

Series: Ascribe to God
Sermon: All-Powerful to Save
Scripture: Psalm 20

June 16, 2024
Rev. Karen H Roberts

1 *The Lord answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!* **2** *May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.* **3** *May he remember all your offerings, and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. (Selah)* **4** *May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans.* **5** *May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners. May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.* **6** *Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand.* **7** *Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.* **8** *They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright.* **9** *Give victory to the king, O Lord; answer us when we call.*

I'm a sucker for a good story, aren't you? To me, a good story is one that stirs something inside you. It taps into your emotions, or stirs your own desires to be transformed in some way. A good story is one in which we see our own humanness for all it is and all it can be.

Maybe that is why I was so mesmerized the first time I saw *The Wizard of Oz*. I was willing to endure the anxiety of the Wicked Witch's threats, and the terror of her flying monkeys that I knew would bring me nightmares...because I needed desperately to believe that Dorothy would get back home, where she was safe and secure and comforted. What little girl, on imagining being lost and alone and threatened, wouldn't understand Dorothy's struggle?

For me, it wasn't just Dorothy that captivated me, it was also the fact that I wanted to whisper into the scarecrow's ear and confess that it bothered me that I didn't feel smart compared to other kids in my class. I wanted to hold the tinman's hand and share in his fear that I might grow up and not have a heart that would be mine...a love that would be expressed and returned. I wanted...oh how I wanted...to creep quietly behind the cowardly lion, because I knew, surely, he would feel brave in the face of my timid, shy, insecurity that caused me to miss out on so many great experiences because I was too scared I would look silly, or be laughed at, or...heaven forbid...I might fail at something I was attempting.

I was all in on their yellow-brick-road journey, caught up in the dream that there might be a wizard who could truly give them all the things that they needed...all the things that I wanted for myself. And then came that crushing moment...the moment when the curtain was pulled back and we learned there was no wizard...there was no great, magical, being who could give them what they sought. It was just a man who had at his disposal all the levers and buttons needed to sound brave and wise, and heart-felt and safe...but was actually none of those things. It was all smoke and mirrors, all fake promises and empty bravado. I remember the bitter disappointment of that moment vividly...the feeling that Dorothy and her friends had lost the battle.

Last week, I said that what I love about the Psalms is their raw human story. I love that they see no need to be meek and mild in their approach to God...these are hard confessions, deep truths, heart-wrenching cries, that are shouted, not whispered. They are stories in which we see our own humanness for all it is...and all it can be.

Perhaps when Pastor Jim read Psalm 20 you imagined a temple adorned with the banners of a King preparing to go into battle. You might have imagined the dignitaries, priests, and people gathered to

shower their king with support and to cheer his bravery and wisdom and heart-felt passion to keep their home safe and secure. It sounds as if it is a psalm of assurance that whatever the circumstance that has led them to war, their king will have the brain, heart, and courage to save them. But...look again...look past the smoke and mirrors and pull back the curtain...it is not the king...and we are not in Oz. We are in the temple and here, there is no disappointment or deceit in what we find...in who we seek.

If we look again, we see that God is the central figure in this Psalm...not the King...and it is God who is victorious.

1 The Lord answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

In Jewish scriptures, when God is referred to as the God of Jacob, it typically means the author wants us to understand God's covenant call to God's people.

When people are faced with battle, they want protection...they are not calling on their king to provide that...they are calling on their God who has promised that.

Then speaking to their king they say:

2 May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.

3 May he remember all your offerings, and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. (Selah)

4 May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans.

The king will need help and support for this fight...and it will not be found in his armor, or sword, or bravery or wit or heart...it will come from God...the same God who will know the heart of the king and the truth of the humility and dedication of his confessions and sacrifices. It is much easier to pray the king's heart desires are granted when you are sure his heart lies in God's will.

5 May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners. May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

6 Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand.

This Psalm is a worship service...it is a ceremony intended to send a king into battle...but it is not carried out as some yellow-brick-road fantasy that the king will be the one all-powerful to save them. The people of God who are offering this prayer have seen that folly...they have watched their ancestors put blind faith in a human king only to discover the disappointment that lies behind the smoke and mirrors of leaders who claim the power of courage, wisdom, and heart...but hold none of its truth.

This prayer is one that is offered with eyes wide open. They are praying with the trust that it is God's hand that guides the king and the king's heart that will submit to it. They are praying that it is God's wisdom that informs the king and the king's brain that will absorb it. They are praying that it is God's courage that emboldens the king and for the king's ability to stand boldly for God's will to be done. They are praying for their homes to be restored, safe and secure...but they know full well it will be God who leads them there...not their king.

This is not a prayer for their king to be victorious as much as it is a prayer for their king to make God's will victorious through his actions. Do you see the difference? To pray for the king to be victorious on his own merit is to put faith in the voice behind the curtain. To pray for the king to ensure God's will is

victorious is to put faith in a servant who has put their faith in a savior and will lead with the wisdom of God's word, the courage of God's purpose, the heart of God's love.

[7](#) Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.

[8](#) They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright.

[9](#) Give victory to the king, O Lord; answer us when we call.

The little girl who watched The Wizard of Oz, first with hope and then with disappointment, did grow up to find the inner strength to realize she was plenty smart enough, plenty brave enough, and had plenty of heart to love and be loved, to feel safe and secure. But I also grew up to know that inner strength to overcome those insecurities was not my own merit or ability...it was God's...it was God's victory to give and my victory to receive.

Maybe that is the battle the king faces...the battle to be humble in the face of growing wisdom, to remain prudent in light of increased courage, to behave compassionately in actions where love can too easily turn to self-gratification. Maybe the prayer isn't for the king to be victorious at war with enemies...but that the king will be victorious in their battle to recognize God's power to save over their own...that their king will be victorious, as he grows and matures and gains his own strength, in submitting himself to God and not relying on his own abilities to lead.

Maybe that is the true victory, not that we rise and stand, but that we do it in God's name...that we find our inner strength not through smoke and mirrors but through an all-creating, all all-loving, all powerful God who calls us to rise in confidence and stand in submission before God's throne.

Maybe it isn't just a prayer for kings but also for little girls who hope and little boys who dream...and for the women and men they will become...the ones who know their strength comes from the Lord and who learn they will never be disappointed in that truth.

Let us pray:

Holy, all powerful God

We confess that we have placed our trust in a humanity that cannot save us.

We have given blind faith to leaders who do not know your ways and have not submitted to your will.

We have sought victory through our own means and rarely through yours.

Forgive us.

Help us to hear the prayer of the Psalmist and claim it as our own.

Help us to give victory to you and you alone for you are the one who helps us to rise and stand, you are the one who give us wisdom and courage, you are the one who is our heart and our security.

We have no reason to trust in any other, apart from how they serve you and call upon your name.

Amen.